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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000311

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL ZI MDC

SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY LEADER RELENTS ON ELECTION BOYCOTT,
LOOKS TO 2008

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

¶11. (C) The Ambassador met February 18 with Lovemore Madukhu, head of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). Madukhu said his organization and other civil society groups regarded the upcoming elections as a sham and had unsuccessfully tried to convince the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) not to participate. That said, they no longer intended to call for a boycott, which would have further damaged the MDC's chances. Madukhu said relations with the MDC were complicated and that outside help and resources would be needed to unite the opposition after the election. He agreed with the Ambassador that the next big chance for change in Zimbabwe would be the 2008 presidential elections. End Summary.

Election Boycott

¶12. (C) Madukhu said that his preferred approach to the upcoming parliamentary elections had been non-participation. It was his belief that this would have underscored the elections illegitimacy and the illegitimacy of the GOZ. His organization and much of Zimbabwean civil society supported such an approach but they had ultimately been unsuccessful in convincing the MDC to go along.

¶13. (C) Madukhu said, however, that his organization would not push for a boycott past March 8, at which time they would issue a statement denouncing the legitimacy of the elections. At the same time, the statement would not urge people to boycott the elections, which he acknowledged could seriously damage the MDC's chances. The Ambassador suggested that the statement should also be worded in such a way as to bolster the MDC by offering moral support for its uphill struggle on a tilted playing field. Madukhu seemed to agree.

Relations with MDC

¶14. (C) Madukhu said he and other civil society groups had complicated and at times difficult relations with the MDC. The MDC was unfair to these groups in that it expected them to do its bidding. He said part of the reason the NCA would wait until March 8 to issue its statement was to underscore the organization's independence from the MDC through the apparent conflict over election participation.

¶15. (C) Madukhu said there was a lot of tension now, but that would dissipate. He noted that the fundamental disagreement with the MDC was how to effect change) through electoral politics or through mass-based actions and constitutional reform) not on the need for change or on the direction it should take. He hoped that after the elections the MDC would see the light and agree to support a mass action campaign of civil disobedience. He added that both the MDC and civil society groups needed to learn to accept differences as normal and to avoid personalizing them.

Post-Election Plans

¶16. (C) The Ambassador said that unless the MDC could pull off a miracle and win two-thirds of the seats in parliament, the March elections would not, indeed could not result in any fundamental change in Zimbabwe's crisis of political legitimacy. Barring unforeseen developments, such as the sudden demise of Mugabe, it appeared that the next real opportunity for fundamental change by democratic means would come in 2008, when presidential elections were scheduled to be held. Between now and then all the democratic forces of Zimbabwe needed to work toward the goal of outing a democrat in power and to be ready to apply the pressure of mass action should ZANU-PF try to steal the elections.

¶17. (C) Madukhu agreed and said the key was to start building momentum now by unifying the opposition around a common platform. He said outside help would be important in that

regard, and he suggested the Embassy could play a key role given that it was trusted by all elements of the opposition, many of whom did not trust each other.

18. (C) The Ambassador said it was his impression that the opposition needed to address the concerns of real people, such as the failure of land reform and the resultant economic collapse, rather than focusing exclusively on more esoteric concerns such as constitutional reform. Madukhu responded that it was important to link issues such as the need for constitutional change to the day-to-day concerns of average Zimbabweans. However, the opposition had to be careful not to give the GOZ sound bites that could be spun against them. For instance, on land reform, any hint that the opposition opposed land reform would be trumpeted in the official press as support for white farmers. Without access to the media, the opposition would be unable to explain that its objection was to land reform,s ineffectiveness.

U.S. Trip

19. (C) Madukhu said he had been encouraged by the degree to which his interlocutors in the Department had understood that the struggle in Zimbabwe had entered a new, longer-term, phase. He had told them change would come to Zimbabwe but it would take time and resources. He added that one of the highlights of the visit had been his address at the Woodrow Wilson Center, where he had found the audience remarkably well-informed. He had been struck by the fact that the official Zimbabwe press had felt the need to report on his address, even though they had tried to spin what he had said to the regime,s advantage.

South Africa,s role

10. (C) Madukhu said the SAG seemed to be bending over backwards to ignore the bad news out of Zimbabwe and to play up whatever signs of democratic space appeared. That said, he thought President Mbeki was under increasing pressure to promote democracy in Zimbabwe, of which the latest manifestation was Obasanjo,s success in convincing Togo to go forward with a presidential election.

Comment

11. (C) We were frankly relieved that Madukhu had already decided on his own not to further undercut the MDC in the upcoming elections. The MDC will have a tough enough fight on its hands, the last thing it needed was to have its civil society allies trying to organize a full-scale boycott of the election.
DELL